This class is about stories. It is about how we tell them, what they mean to us, and how narrative permeates the very fabric of our understanding of the world. Considering this and remembering that our “universe” of stories includes narratives that we have been told, have read, and tell ourselves; we can safely say that we are not the authors of our entire sense of the world. This raises several interesting questions about the relationship between the “self” and the “other.” Some of these questions include: Are our stories our own? Who speaks for us? How do I know who I am? What obligation, if any, do I have towards others? To what extent are we determined by history? and What is the relationship between speech and experience? It is my hope that we can begin to answer these questions and raise other ones that will enable us to understand better the process through which we try to make sense of the world.

In order to approach these questions, we will read and analyze a series of literary and philosophical texts and we will also view two films. Please note that all the course material highlights the difficulty of interpretation. In other words, our goal is to develop the critical thinking skills that enable us to more accurately read our experiences and understand representations of our environments. With this goal in mind, I have decided to introduce you to a number of works that interrogate the notions of identity, authority, and truth. In other words, we will use the texts in our course as examples for an investigation of how narratives construct or if you prefer, color, our sense of “reality.”

Texts in the course include: H.C. Andersen’s “The Snow Queen, Isak Dinesen’s (Karen Blixen’s) "The Blank Page" and "Roads Round Pisa," Søren Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling, Selma Lagerlöf’s The Saga of Gösta Berling, and two tales by Edgar Allen Poe, “William Wilson” and “The Man of the Crowd.” We shall also watch two films, Reprise by Joakim von Trier, and Ingmar Bergman’s The Seventh Seal.

The class is conducted in English.

This course satisfies both the Arts and Letters group and the International Cultures requirements.